

Warfare, Demography & Anthropogenic Transformation at Angel Mounds State Historic Site

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Abstract

Recent investigations by the Department of Anthropology (IU School of Liberal Arts) and the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology (IU-Bloomington) at Angel Mounds have greatly enhanced our understanding of this Mississippian period (AD 1050-1450) village located on the Ohio River in southwestern Indiana. During this timeframe, the Ohio Valley and adjoining regions witnessed an evolution in social complexity with the emergence of small-scale polities, population aggregation in fortified towns, and associated earthwork construction. Angel Mounds was established, grew in prominence, and was eventually abandoned. However, until recently, absolute ages from the site were sparse and the chronology of the town's settlement, growth and abandonment was poorly understood. Similarly, chronological models for earthwork and fortification construction were non-existent.

Our research has revealed that Angel Mounds began as a ceremonial center between AD 1100 and 1300 with few occupants. The residential population at Angel Mounds grew precipitously after AD 1300. By AD 1400, we estimate that as many as 1,000 people lived at Angel Mounds. Concurrently, a series of fortifications were erected at the site to protect the inhabitants from neighboring polities. Meanwhile, earthworks on site were "capped" and abandoned soon thereafter, which may reflect the sociopolitical disintegration of Angel Mounds. Depending on the type of agricultural production and environmental change with the onset of the Little Ice Age, these patterns have important implications for settlement longevities, the historical ecology of land-use, and population estimates in the Eastern Woodlands of North America by AD 1500. With support from the Nation Science Foundation, the next three years of investigations at Angel Mounds will continue to focus on population dynamics, earthwork construction and use, anthropogenic transformation of the landscape, and environmental change during the Medieval Warm and Little Ice Age.